

The Japanese in Hawaii: a historical and demographic perspective

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The history of political, economic, and social changes in Hawaii during the past century is closely interwoven with the story of the populating of these islands by immigrants from diverse areas of the globe. The experience of the Japanese who arrived as indentured plantation workers demonstrates their response to educational and economic opportunities and their significant contributions to the social transformation and demographic transition of the island community.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Japanese were probably among the earliest migrants to come to the Hawaiian Islands.¹ Investigation of ancient landings on Oahu indicates the possibility of visits by seafarers from Japan, and a legend tells of a wrecked Japanese fishing vessel that was cast ashore at Kahalui, Maui, as early as five hundred years before the arrival of Captain James Cook in 1778.²

During the early nineteenth century there were several Japanese sailing vessel mishaps, and rescued seamen were brought to the islands. Though most of the visitors returned to their homeland, three men from Japan chose to remain in the islands and became naturalized as subjects of the Kingdom of Hawaii before 1850.

I. *Massive Immigration (1868-1907)*³

The growth of the sugar industry as the base for the Hawaiian economy in the 1850s gave impetus to an increased demand for cheap

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labor. Japan was not open to Western recruitment until 1868, when Eugene Van Reed, the Hawaiian consul general in Yokohama, solicited the first group of 148 Japanese immigrants (140 men, six women, and two children).⁴ They were called the *Gannen Mono*, the “First-Year People” because they came to Hawaii in Meiji Gannen, the first year in the reign of Emperor Meiji.

“First and nearest to us lies Japan, inhabited by a people generally considered akin to the Hawaiians and who, we all agree, would be desirable immigrants,” said Dr. William Hillebrand, Commissioner of the Bureau of Immigration in the 1860s.⁵ It was not long, however, before complaints were received. Japanese workers charged that their contracts had been violated and they had received poor treatment on their jobs.⁶ About 40 Japanese laborers were returned to their homeland by the Hawaiian government, and the Board of Immigration redrafted a treaty on immigrant arrangements with Japan to ensure improved treatment for the laborers.

In 1872, Politician Walter Murray Gibson declared to the Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii:

You have considered the races that are desirable, not only to supply your needs of labor but to furnish an increase of population that will assimilate with the Hawaiian. . . . We must look to races, who whilst being good workers, will not much affect the identity of the Hawaiian, and whose gradual influx will harmonize with, and strengthen, by the infusion of new blood, the native stock. A moderate portion of the Japanese, of the agricultural class, will not conflict with the view that I present, and if they bring their women with them, and settle permanently in the country, they may be counted upon as likely to become desirable Hawaiian subjects.⁷

King Kalakaua visited Japan for ten days in 1881 while making a global tour. His meeting with Emperor Meiji improved the relationship of the Kingdom with the Japanese government, and an economic depression in Japan served as an impetus for agricultural workers to leave their homeland. Earlier contracts which provided a wage of \$4 a month plus food, housing, and medical care were replaced with new arrangements for free steerage passage, wages per month of \$9 for men and \$6 for women, food allowance, lodging, medical care, fuel, no taxes, and a required savings account. While only 116 Japanese were reported as residents in the 1884 census of the Hawaiian Kingdom, the Territory of Hawaii recorded 47,508 men and 13,603 women of the Japanese race in 1900.^{8,9}

The laborers were selected “from the farming class with particular attention given to physical condition, youth, and industrious habits.”¹⁰ They were predominantly unskilled male workers from Hiroshima and Yamaguchi, two neighboring prefectures in the Chugoku district of southwest Japan, and they were accustomed to rural village patterns of

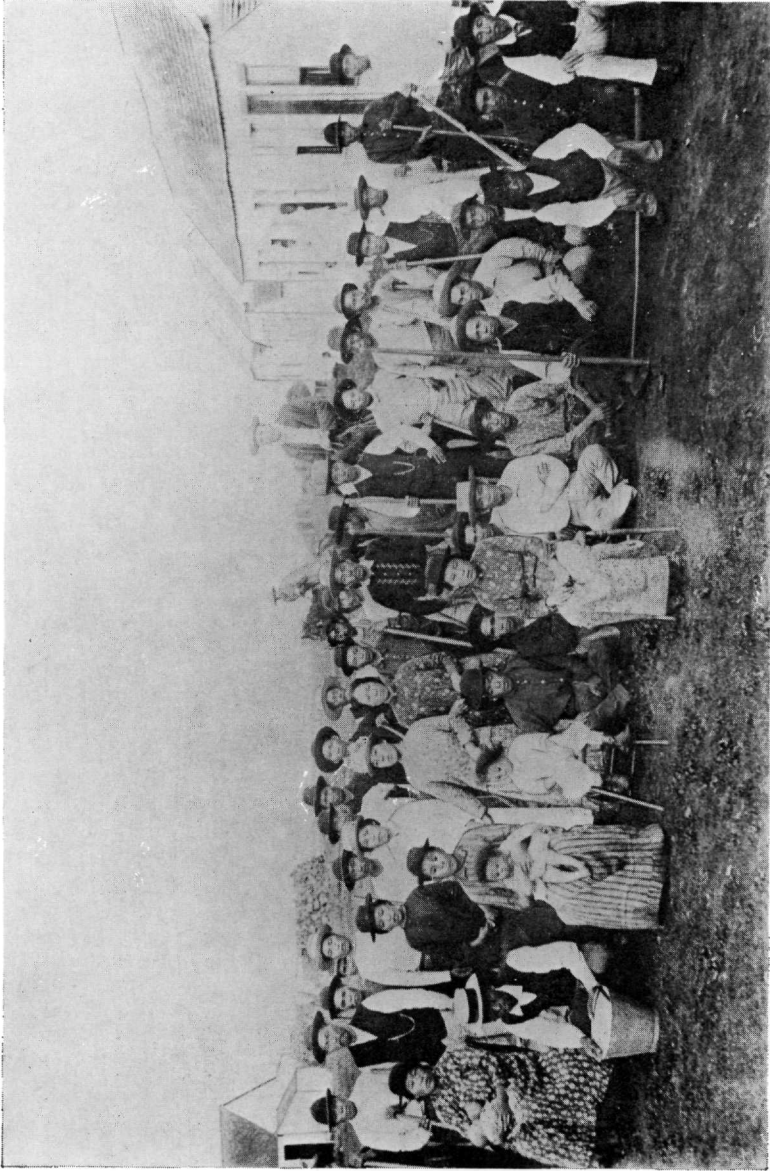
early marriage, high birth rates, and large families. About 20,000 Japanese immigrants arrived from Okinawa between 1900 and 1924; they were gradually assimilated with the Japanese from Japan into the local community.

A growing resentment toward numbers of foreign laborers, particularly in California, precipitated the passage of *The Immigration Act of 1907*, which excluded from admission into the United States "persons hereinafter called contract laborers." This law provided the legal framework for an Executive Order of March 14, 1907, that stated it was the duty of the President to refuse entry to citizens of any foreign government that issued passports for the purpose of enabling the holders to come to the United States "to the detriment of labor conditions therein."¹¹ This was followed by the *Gentlemen's Agreement of 1908* whereby the Japanese Government cooperated with the United States and imposed restrictions upon the departure of Japanese emigrants for the United States. The issuance of passports to Hawaii was limited to "former residents" and "parents, wives, and children of residents." Congress closed the door on further immigration by passing the Immigration Quota Law of May 26, 1924, also known as the "Japanese Exclusion Act." This law declared that aliens ineligible for citizenship (only white and black aliens were eligible) were excluded from permanent immigration, and it governed immigration policy until 1952.¹²

II. *Period of Family Formation (1908-1920)*

The period from 1908 to 1920 is commonly called the *Yobiyose Jidai*, the "period of summoning" of brides and families. Unlike the Chinese and Caucasian immigrant workers who intermarried with Hawaiian and Portuguese women, Japanese males seldom intermarried because of the availability of Japanese women as "picture brides" (young women who were married by proxy in Japan to men whom they had never met or who married after meeting their intended husbands upon arrival in the Territory of Hawaii). Between 1911 and 1919 there were 9,841 picture brides admitted at the port of Honolulu, and in 1920, there were more Japanese men who were married than men of any other ethnic group in Hawaii.¹³

Arrivals from Japan between 1868 and 1924 totaled 159,288 men, 49,612 women, and 4,852 children. Disenchanted with work on the plantations, many Japanese moved away after the expiration of their contracts. Sociologist Andrew Lind estimates that 40,000 persons left Hawaii for the continental United States, and many returned to Japan.¹⁴ However, the majority of the Japanese population remained in the



Japanese immigrant plantation workers in Hawaii in 1890. J. T. Phillips Collection State Archives.



Kailua Madrigal Choir Director Shigeru Hotoke is greeted at the Capitol in Washington, D.C. in 1974 by United States Representative Sparky M. Matsunaga, Patsy Takemoto Mink, and Senator Daniel K. Inouye.

Courtesy of Patsy T. Mink

islands, sought improvement in their working and living conditions, and promoted educational achievement for their children.

The count of the Japanese population in Hawaii increased from 79,675 in 1910 to 109,274 in 1920, when it constituted 42.7 percent of the total population (Table 1). The relatively high crude birth rate among the Japanese (43.7 per thousand in 1920) was related to the large percentage

TABLE 1. THE JAPANESE POPULATION IN HAWAII

Year	Population					
	Numbers		Percentage		Average Annual Growth Rate ^b	
	Japanese	Total ^a	Japanese	Total	Japanese	Total
1872: Dec. 27	N.A.	56,897	N.A.	100.00	N.A.	-1.7
1884: Dec. 27	116	80,578	0.1	100.00	N.A.	5.5
1890: Dec. 28	12,610	89,990	14.0	100.00	78.1	1.8
1900: June 1	61,111	154,001	22.4	100.00	15.8	9.4
1910: Apr. 15	79,675	191,874	39.7	100.00	2.7	2.2
1920: Jan. 1	109,274	255,881	41.5	100.00	3.2	3.0
1930: Apr. 1	139,631	368,300	42.7	100.00	2.4	3.6
1940: Apr. 1	157,905	422,770	37.9	100.00	1.2	1.4
1950: Apr. 1	184,598	499,794	37.3	100.00	1.6	1.7
1960: Apr. 1	203,455	632,772	36.9	100.00	1.0	2.4
1970: Apr. 1	217,669	769,913	32.2	100.00	0.7	1.9

N.A. = Not available.

a "Total" includes all persons residing in the Kingdom, Territory, or State of Hawaii.

b Computed by the formula $r = 100 \log_e (P_2/P_1)/t$.

Sources: Schmitt, 1968, Table 1; Gardner and Nordyke, 1974, Table 3.

married and to the age and sex composition of their population (40.6 percent of the Japanese population were between the ages of 20 and 45). Population increase was also associated with the reduction of deaths brought about by improved health, better nutrition, and reduced maternal and infant mortality.

Many *Issei* (first generation immigrants from Japan) and *Nisei* (children of *Issei*) moved to Honolulu and other developing urban centers. The alien land laws encouraged urbanization since non-citizens could not own land. *Isseis* became independent wage earners, merchants, shopkeepers, and tradesmen. They sought and began to achieve upward mobility.

III. *Maturation of the Nisei (1921-1941)*

The children of *Issei* immigrants born in Hawaii were American citizens by birth. American law required schooling for children, and

education was encouraged by Japanese families. The public schools instilled the American creed of equal opportunity that cut across ethnic differences, the virtues of free enterprise, and the importance of government by the people. The Niseis were molded by the democratic ideals of equality and freedom.

At first the Japanese had little political power because they were predominantly alien or too young to vote. However, as the number of Niseis attaining young adulthood increased, so did their voting strength. Whereas in 1920 the Japanese constituted only 2.5 percent of the total registered voters in Hawaii, the proportion rose to 13 percent in 1930 and to 31 percent in 1940.¹⁵

As the Niseis of the 1930s sought a higher standard of living, there was a simultaneous decline in fertility. Their reproductive behavior exhibited a tendency toward fewer births and smaller family size. The crude birth rate in 1920 of 43.7 live births per 1,000 Japanese dropped to only 20.6 births per 1,000 persons in 1940. Other indicators of population trends, such as the general fertility rate, total fertility rate, child-woman ratio, and gross reproduction rate, showed similar reproductive reduction (Table 2). The decline in fertility during the two decades preceding World War II was evidence of the striving by Japanese in Hawaii for educational, economic, and social equality.

IV. *World War II (1942-1945)*

When fighter planes of Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Hawaii was immediately placed under martial law. The war was a difficult period for persons of Japanese descent in Hawaii. The United States government did not permit Americans of Japanese ancestry to volunteer in active military service until January, 1943, when 7,500 young Nisei were inducted and fought together as the 100th Battalion, then as the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, in Europe. The valor of the Japanese soldiers from Hawaii on the battlefields of Europe (half of whom were killed or wounded in action) has become legend.¹⁶

Many Japanese who remained in Hawaii assisted with defense jobs at Schofield and other military installations. They demonstrated their allegiance to their country, and their diligent employment served to improve their general standard of living in the islands.

V. *Upward Mobility (1946-1959)*

The American democratic way of life can assimilate and amalgamate these people, the Japanese racial group, as it has every other racial group. They are a little more recent in their arrival here. Some of their background is a little harder to overcome. But the war has proven that American democracy does work,

declared Samuel Wilder King, delegate to Congress in 1946.¹⁷

TABLE 2. FERTILITY, MORTALITY, AND MIGRATION OF THE JAPANESE IN HAWAII

Year	Fertility ^a						Migration from abroad ^f					
	Crude Birth Rate ^b		General Fertility Rate ^d		Total Fertility Rate ^e		Gross Reproduction Rate ^f		Child Woman Ratios			
	Japanese	Total ^c	Japanese	Total	Japanese	Total	Japanese	Total	Japanese	Total		
1872: Dec. 27	N.A.	100.6 ^c	N.A.	187.0	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	750	
1884: Dec. 27	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	107.0	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	850	
1890: Dec. 28	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	900	
1900: June 1	3.6	6.7	20.9	39.1	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	314.5	
1910: Apr. 15	22.4	22.4	124.9	124.6	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	657.1	
1920: Jan. 1	43.5	39.7	207.1	205.8	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	720.1	
1930: Apr. 1	33.0	29.3	176.8	172.1	5618.5	5154.0	2705.5	2482.0	3433.2	765.4	705.0	
1940: Apr. 1	20.6	22.2	87.4	106.8	2784.5	3055.5	1347.5	1479.2	355.3	355.3	417.8	
1950: Apr. 1	24.8	28.1	95.8	125.0	2490.0	3316.0	1235.0	1640.8	429.2	429.2	523.5	
1960: Apr. 1	20.4	27.2	84.4	127.8	2711.0	3886.5	1308.5	1884.0	388.2	388.2	545.4	
1970: Apr. 1	13.5	21.4	58.3	96.1	1978.5	2728.5	956.0	1318.0	237.2	237.2	365.5	

Ages	Fertility			Mortality			Migration from abroad ^f		
	1970 Age-Specific Rates			Crude Death Rate ^h			Japanese migration as percent of total		
	Japanese	Total	Year	Japanese	Total	Years	Japanese	Total	Japanese migration as percent of total
15-19	19.6	62.5	1900	12.8	15.4	1901-1910	76,538	93,888	81.5
20-24	92.9	173.8	1910	12.3	16.5	1911-1920	29,795	40,030	74.4
25-29	159.2	169.8	1920	13.4	17.6	1921-1930	9,538	12,639	75.5
30-34	87.2	91.7	1930	8.6	10.5	1931-1940	N.A.	931	N.A.
35-39	30.6	38.5	1940	5.7	7.2	1941-1950	N.A.	2,991	N.A.
40-44	6.0	8.8	1950	5.3	5.9	1951-1960	N.A.	10,494	N.A.
45-49	0.2	0.6	1960	5.2	5.6	1961-1970	3,145	34,721	9.1
			1970	5.5	5.4	1971-1975	2,607	35,062	7.4

N.A. = Not available.

a Figures for 1970 are not directly comparable with other years because of changed definitions of ethnic groups.

b The number of live births per year per 1,000 mid-period population.

c "Total" includes all persons residing in the Kingdom, Territory, or State of Hawaii.

d The number of live births per year per 1,000 females of ages 15-44.

e The number of children per 1,000 women who complete their childbearing years and experience a given set of age-specific fertility rates.

f The number of female children per 1,000 women who complete their childbearing years and experience a given set of age-specific fertility rates.

g The number of children under age 5 per 1,000 women ages 15-49.

h The number of deaths per 1,000 mid-period population based upon a 3-year average.

i Filipinos, who were U.S. nationals until 1946, are not included in the total count for immigrants from abroad until 1961.

Sources: Nordyke, 1976, unpublished table; "Summary indices of fertility of ethnic groups in Hawaii"; Nordyke, 1977, Tables 6, 7, 11.

In the era that followed World War II, the Niseis were "coming of age." Their rising level of education correlated with higher levels of occupational and political achievement. Educator Randall Hongo explained in 1972:

The Japanese world in which I was raised in Hawaii conditioned me early to believe that education was the only means to success in life and to a full life. It was impressed upon me that education would result in a good job, steady income to live a comfortable life, appreciation of cultural achievements of man, and a good measure of status in the community.¹⁸

In 1950, the Japanese registered 94 percent of 16 and 17 year olds in school attendance in contrast to only 35 percent of Japanese children of similar ages in 1920 and 73 percent in 1940.¹⁹ Many Niseis received university education in Hawaii or in the continental United States under the GI Bill of Rights and secured training in law, medicine, engineering, and other professions.

The maturing Niseis challenged the political status quo and broke the Republican political hegemony of the Islands.²⁰ With the self-confidence acquired as veterans of World War II, they cooperated with employees of agriculture and industry to establish the formation of labor unions. The passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 enabled the Isseis to become naturalized U.S. citizens.

The population of the Hawaii Japanese in 1950 was 184,598, or 36.9 percent of the total population. During the post-war "baby boom," the crude birth rate for this group was 24.8 per thousand in 1950, but it gradually declined to 19.3 per thousand by 1960. The high level of fertility of the first generation Issei was thus followed by sharp decreases by the second generation Nisei. Such a fertility pattern is often demonstrated by minority groups in the process of acculturation. The fertility transition reflected a gradual change in status from agriculture to non-agricultural occupations, from lower to higher levels of income, from large to smaller family size, and from the alien laborer to the citizen of rising influence.

VI. *Socio-Political Prominence (1960-Present)*

The Americans of Japanese ancestry in Hawaii gained prominence in the second half of the twentieth century. Economist Thomas K. Hitch reported in 1971:

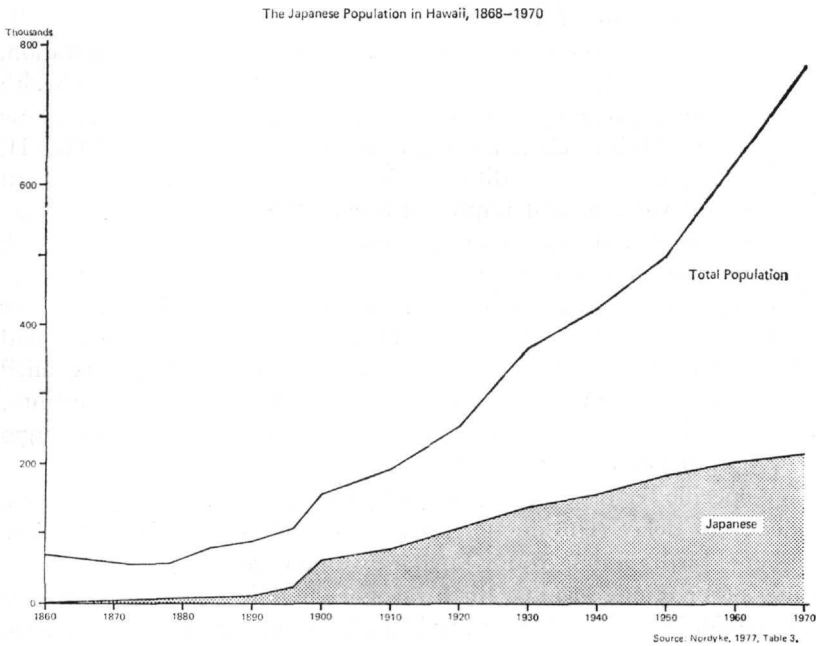
During the 55 year period from 1915 to 1970, the percentage of practitioners of Japanese ancestry in certain professions in Hawaii increased dramatically: from 2 percent to 24.7 percent among attorneys, from zero percent to 21.4 percent among architects, from 6 percent to 61.5 percent among dentists, and from zero percent to 65.5 percent among optometrists.²¹

In 1962, war veteran Daniel K. Inouye won a seat in the U.S. Senate. Representatives Sparky M. Matsunaga and Patsy T. Mink were Japanese Americans who gained seats in the U.S. House of Representatives in the 1960s. George R. Ariyoshi was elected Hawaii's governor in 1974, becoming the first American of Oriental ancestry to win a governorship in the United States. Other Japanese in roles of State leadership in the 1970s include Lieutenant Governor Nelson K. Doi and University of Hawaii President Fujio Matsuda.

The 1965 amendment to the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952 liberalized the provisions of immigrants from Asia and the Pacific.²² Persons from all parts of the world, regardless of their race, were eligible to apply for permanent residence. This amendment served to erase racial discrimination against Orientals in the areas of immigration and naturalization.

DEMOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

The population of Japanese in Hawaii, as reported in the 1970 U.S. census, was 217,669, or 28.3 percent of the total population of the State. In a period of about a century the alien immigrants have increased in number, intermingled, and become a relatively stable component of the Hawaiian community (Figure 1).

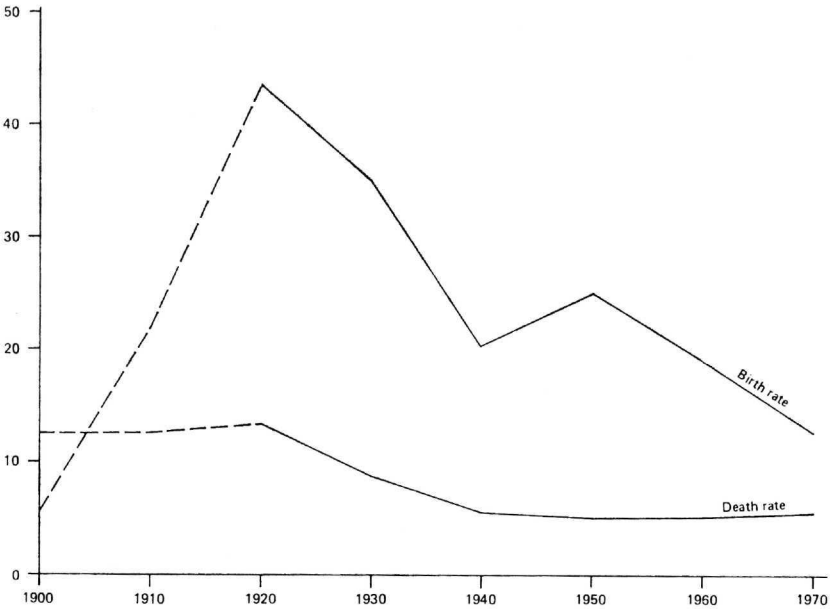


The Japanese population has been inconsistently defined by succeeding census taken by the Kingdom of Hawaii and the U.S. Bureau of the Census and by vital statistics gathered by the State Department of Health, with the result that some statistical confusion and inaccuracies arise when data are compared over time. Until 1970, children of Japanese mothers and white fathers were classified as Japanese, and children of other Japanese mixed marriages were allocated to the race of the father, except for Japanese-Hawaiian children, who were counted in early censuses as Asiatic-Hawaiian and later as Part-Hawaiian. The 1970 census classified ethnicity according to self-identification. Since data for numerators of birth rates of the 1970s are secured by Health Department registrars using the 1960 census definitions and data for denominators are population figures from the 1970 census, results merit interpretation in relation to definitional discrepancies. Japanese had less intermarriage than other ethnic groups in the first (Issei) and second (Nisei) generations, but the proportion of Japanese women who married persons of another race increased from 9.4 to 15.3 percent between 1960 and 1970. More than half of the Japanese in Hawaii in the 1970s are Sansei and Yonsei (third and fourth generation).²³ An increasing number are children of mixed marriages.

The basic components of demographic change—migration, mortality, and fertility—are factors in the population growth and stability of the Japanese in Hawaii (Table 2). Numbers of people increased rapidly during the early years of subsidized and voluntary immigration. Mortality rates in Hawaii dropped with improved technology in health care, and life expectancy increased.²⁴ Natural increase of the Japanese occurred with high levels of fertility in 1920–1930. After World War II, the advancing economic conditions, wider opportunities for employment for men and women, and improved social status resulted in, or were accompanied by, a desire for smaller family size. The fall of crude birth rates continued to a new low of 13.5 births per 1,000 Japanese in 1970 (Figure 2). The general fertility rates (the number of live births per year among 1,000 women of reproductive age) showed that the Japanese and Chinese had the lowest figure among the ethnic groups in Hawaii.²⁵ The gross reproduction rate, a more specific measurement of fertility, indicated a level that was less than unity at .956; that is, the 1970 generation of Japanese females was not replacing itself.

Age-specific fertility rates show that Japanese women in 1970 have a tendency to delay reproduction to the ages of 25–34 (Table 2). The number of births among young Japanese women aged 15–19 is lower than among other ethnic groups. Birth rates at the oldest ages (40–49) have dropped significantly and show a rapid decline of fertility in this age group.

The Demographic Transition of the Japanese in Hawaii, 1900-1970



Note: Birth and death rates for 1900 and 1910 are based on data which are unreliable and are probably understated.

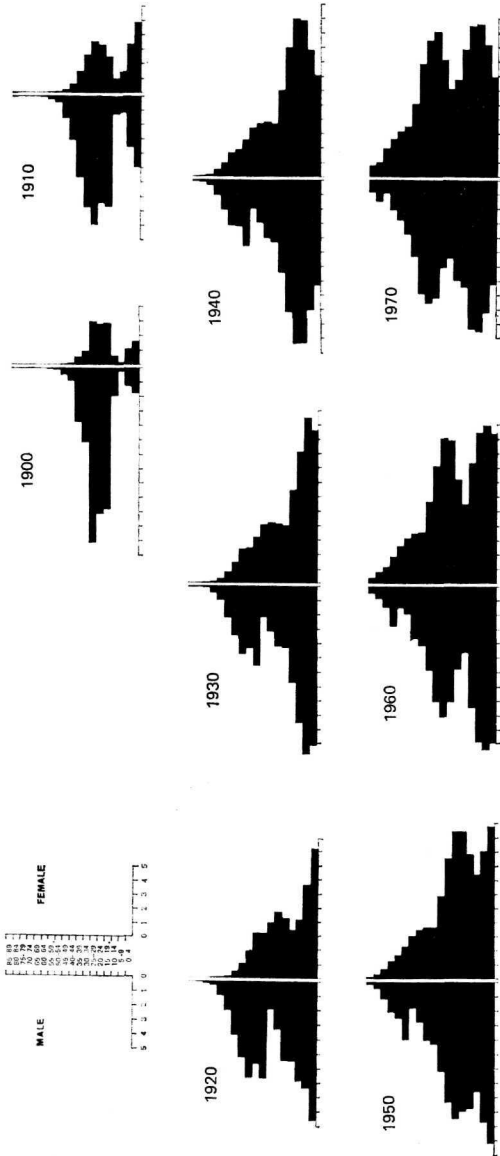
Sources: See Table 2.

Japanese in Hawaii have the highest percentage of working wives. In 1970, 62.4 percent of all married Japanese females aged 14 and above were in the labor force, in contrast with 46.2 percent working wives age 14 and over in the total Hawaii population.²⁶ Japanese women work before and after marriage, and the average marital ages (22.3 years for the Japanese female and 26.4 for the Japanese male in 1970) were consistently higher than those found in other ethnic groups. The low fertility of Japanese women may be attributable in part to the large percentage of working wives and to the late age at first marriage.²⁷

Comparisons of family size in the 1960 and 1970 censuses indicate that the number of related persons in the same household in Japanese families dropped from 4.1 to 3.8, a figure still higher than the State total of 3.7 persons per family. A closer look at family components, however, gives fewer children and more older persons, as indicated by the child-woman ratio, which has dropped from a 1930 high of 756 to a 1970 low of 237 children under age five per 1,000 women of ages 15 to 49.

During the past seventy years the age and sex composition of the Japanese in Hawaii has changed markedly (Figure 3). The male immigrants distort the profile of the 1900 population pyramid, and the

Japanese Population in Hawaii by Age and Sex, 1900—1970



Source: Nordyke, 1977, Figure 10.

excess of males in the 20- to 40-year age group is visible in each succeeding decade as this group aged. The expansion of the base of the pyramids caused by high birth rates of the 1920-1930 and the 1940-1960 periods contrasts with the contraction of the pyramids related to reduction of births in the 1930-1940 and 1960-1970 decades. The growth, aging,

and stabilizing of the population are evident with the ballooning and balancing of the pyramid in 1970.

Conclusion

The history of the Japanese immigrants to Hawaii mirrors their demographic response to complex changes and opportunities in a new land. The growth of the Japanese population in Hawaii was the result of the immigration of youthful male laborers, the deliberate importation of "picture brides," and the natural increase that followed the high level of fertility during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Demographers have interpreted population shifts as a response to economic and social factors as patterns of living adapt to the change from rural to urban society. The transition from rural alien first generation Japanese to urbanized third and fourth generation U.S. citizens of Japanese ancestry has been accompanied by altered standards of living and patterns of behavior. The average annual growth rate of the Japanese population in Hawaii dropped from levels of 2 to 3 percent in the 1900-1930 era to a low of 0.68 in 1960-1970. Current fertility levels are below replacement level. Unless there is a resurgence of birth rates or further Japanese in-migration from the U.S. or abroad, the Hawaiian Japanese population has reached a level of stabilization. If current trends continue, the future may bring a reduced percentage of Japanese in relation to the total State population, and an increased mixing of the Japanese with other racial groups in Hawaii.

The Japanese in Hawaii in the final quarter of the twentieth century identify first with the Hawaiian-American way of life and only secondarily with their ancestral traditions.²⁸ New laws have erased racial discrimination, and mixed marriages have blended ethnic ancestry. A sharp fertility decline has indicated sensitivity to social and economic goals and reflected altered views toward family size and women's roles. The demographic history of the Japanese of these islands documents their manifold contributions in merging and strengthening the Hawaiian community.

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